

# IOWA CODE OF JUDICIAL CONDUCT

## CHAPTER 51(in part)

### *Canon 4*

***A JUDGE OR CANDIDATE FOR JUDICIAL OFFICE SHALL NOT ENGAGE IN  
POLITICAL OR CAMPAIGN ACTIVITY THAT IS INCONSISTENT WITH THE  
INDEPENDENCE, INTEGRITY, OR IMPARTIALITY OF THE JUDICIARY***

#### **Rule 51:4.1: POLITICAL AND CAMPAIGN ACTIVITIES OF JUDGES AND JUDICIAL CANDIDATES IN GENERAL**

**(A) Except as permitted by law,\* or by rules 51:4.2, 51:4.3, and 51:4.4, a judge or a judicial candidate\* shall not:**

- (1) act as a leader in, or hold an office in, a political organization;\***
- (2) make speeches on behalf of a political organization;**
- (3) publicly endorse or oppose a candidate for any public office;**
- (4) solicit funds for, pay an assessment to, or make a contribution\* to a political organization, a candidate for judicial retention, or a candidate for public office;**
- (5) attend or purchase tickets for dinners or other events sponsored by a political organization or a candidate for public office;**
- (6) publicly identify himself or herself as a candidate of a political organization;**
- (7) seek, accept, or use endorsements from a political organization;**
- (8) personally solicit\* or accept campaign contributions other than through a campaign committee authorized by rule 51:4.4;**
- (9) use or permit the use of campaign contributions for the private benefit of the judge, the judicial candidate, or others;**
- (10) use court staff, facilities, or other court resources in a campaign for judicial office;**
- (11) knowingly,\* or with reckless disregard for the truth, make any false or misleading statement;**
- (12) make any statement that would reasonably be expected to affect the outcome or impair the fairness of a pending matter\* or impending matter\* in any court; or**
- (13) in connection with cases, controversies, or issues that are likely to come before the court, make pledges, promises, or commitments that are inconsistent with the impartial\* performance of the adjudicative duties of judicial office,**
- (14) participate in a precinct caucus; or**
- (15) solicit or accept any campaign contributions from any judicial branch employee.**

**(B) A judge or judicial candidate shall take reasonable measures to ensure that other persons do not undertake, on behalf of the judge or judicial candidate, any activities prohibited under paragraph (A).**

#### **Comment**

##### **General Considerations**

[1] Even when subject to a retention election, a judge plays a role different from that of a legislator or executive branch official. Rather than making decisions based upon the expressed views or preferences of the electorate, a judge makes decisions based upon the law and the facts of every case. Therefore, in furtherance of this interest, judges and judicial candidates must, to the greatest extent possible, be free and appear to be free from political influence and political pressure. This Canon imposes narrowly tailored restrictions upon the political and campaign activities of all judges and judicial candidates.

[2] When a person becomes a judicial candidate, this Canon becomes applicable to his or her conduct.

### Participation in Political Activities

[3] Public confidence in the independence and impartiality of the judiciary is eroded if judges or judicial candidates are perceived to be subject to political influence. Although judges and judicial candidates may register to vote as members of a political party, they are prohibited by paragraph (A)(1) from assuming leadership roles in political organizations.

[4] Paragraphs (A)(2) and (A)(3) prohibit judges and judicial candidates from making speeches on behalf of political organizations or publicly endorsing or opposing candidates for public office, respectively, to prevent them from abusing the prestige of judicial office to advance the interests of others. See rule 51:1.3. These rules do not prohibit judicial candidates from campaigning on their own behalf. See rule 51:4.2(B)(2).

[5] Although members of the families of judges and judicial candidates are free to engage in their own political activity, including running for public office, there is no “family exception” to the prohibition in paragraph (A)(3) against a judge or judicial candidate publicly endorsing candidates for public office. A judge or judicial candidate must not become involved in, or publicly associated with, a family member’s political activity or campaign for public office. To avoid public misunderstanding, judges and judicial candidates should take, and should urge members of their families to take, reasonable steps to avoid any implication that they endorse any family member’s candidacy or other political activity.

[6] Judges and judicial candidates retain the right to participate in the political process as voters in both primary and general elections. For purposes of this Canon, participation in a caucus-type election procedure does constitute public support for or endorsement of a political organization or candidate, and is prohibited by this Code. In Iowa, a precinct caucus is organized and held by a political party in order to elect delegates to a party’s county convention and, thus, serves a purely political purpose. See Iowa Code § 43.4.

### Statements and Comments Made during a Campaign for Judicial Office

[7] Judicial candidates must be scrupulously fair and accurate in all statements made by them and by their campaign committees. Paragraph (A)(11) obligates judicial candidates and their committees to refrain from making statements that are false or misleading or that omit facts necessary to make the communication considered as a whole not materially misleading.

[8] Judicial candidates are sometimes the subject of false, misleading, or unfair allegations made by third parties or the media. For example, false or misleading statements might be made regarding the identity, present position, experience, qualifications, or judicial rulings of a judicial candidate. In other situations, false or misleading allegations may be made that bear upon a judicial candidate’s integrity or fitness for judicial office. As long as the judicial candidate does not violate paragraphs (A)(11), (A)(12), or (A)(13), the judicial candidate may make a factually accurate public response.

[9] Subject to paragraph (A)(12), a judicial candidate is permitted to respond directly to false, misleading, or unfair allegations made against him or her during a campaign, although it is preferable for someone else to respond if the allegations relate to a pending case.

[10] Paragraph (A)(12) prohibits judicial candidates from making comments that might impair the fairness of pending or impending judicial proceedings. This provision does not restrict arguments or statements to the court or jury by a lawyer who is a judicial candidate, or rulings, statements, or instructions by a judge that may appropriately affect the outcome of a matter.

### Pledges, Promises, or Commitments Inconsistent with Impartial Performance of the Adjudicative Duties of Judicial Office

[11] The role of a judge is different from that of a legislator or executive branch official, even when the judge is subject to a retention election. Campaigns for retention must be conducted differently from campaigns for other offices. The narrowly drafted restrictions upon political and campaign activities of judicial candidates provided in Canon 4 allow candidates to conduct campaigns that provide voters with sufficient information to permit them to make informed electoral choices.

[12] Paragraph (A)(13) makes applicable to both judges and judicial candidates the prohibition

that applies to judges in rule 51:2.10(B) relating to pledges, promises, or commitments that are inconsistent with the impartial performance of the adjudicative duties of judicial office.

[13] The making of a pledge, promise, or commitment is not dependent upon, or limited to, the use of any specific words or phrases; instead, the totality of the statement must be examined to determine if a reasonable person would believe that the candidate for judicial office has specifically undertaken to reach a particular result. Pledges, promises, or commitments must be contrasted with statements or announcements of personal views on legal, political, or other issues, which are not prohibited. When making such statements, a judge should acknowledge the overarching judicial obligation to apply and uphold the law, without regard to his or her personal views.

[14] A judicial candidate may make campaign promises related to judicial organization, administration, and court management, such as a promise to dispose of a backlog of cases, start court sessions on time, or avoid favoritism in appointments and hiring. A judicial candidate may also pledge to take action outside the courtroom, such as working toward an improved jury selection system, or advocating for more funds to improve the physical plant and amenities of the courthouse.

[15] Judicial candidates may receive questionnaires or requests for interviews from the media and from issue advocacy or other community organizations that seek to learn their views on disputed or controversial legal or political issues. Paragraph (A)(13) does not specifically address judicial responses to such inquiries. Depending upon the wording and format of such questionnaires, judicial candidates' responses might be viewed as pledges, promises, or commitments to perform the adjudicative duties of office other than in an impartial way. To avoid violating paragraph (A)(13), therefore, judicial candidates who respond to media and other inquiries should also give assurances that they will keep an open mind and will carry out their adjudicative duties faithfully and impartially if retained. Judicial candidates who do not respond may state their reasons for not responding, such as the danger that answering might be perceived by a reasonable person as undermining a retained judge's independence or impartiality, or that it might lead to frequent disqualification. See rule 51:2.11.

#### **Rule 51:4.3: ACTIVITIES OF CANDIDATES FOR APPOINTIVE JUDICIAL OFFICE**

**A candidate for appointment to judicial office may:**

**(A) communicate with the appointing or confirming authority, including any selection, screening, or nominating commission or similar agency; and**

**(B) seek endorsements for the appointment from any person or organization other than a partisan political organization.**

#### **Comment**

[1] When seeking support or endorsement, or when communicating directly with an appointing or confirming authority, a candidate for appointive judicial office must not make any pledges, promises, or commitments that are inconsistent with the impartial performance of the adjudicative duties of the office. See rule 51:4.1(A)(13).